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ABSTRACT

The prismatic family type described in this report represents an intermediate situation between rural and urban value systems. The heads of the 3 white and 3 black families studied were in the age group 30-39 in 1961. The structured interview method was used to gather information in 1961 and 1966. In depth interviews were conducted in 1972 to understand the dynamics of changes. Data interpretations were presented to see the changes that have taken place in these families, the adjustment to these changes, and the delineation of the prismatic types and characteristics. It was found that prismatic families show lines of tension between traditional and modern value systems, experience anomic feelings caused by discrepancies between traditional and modern values, perceive minimal class differences, and experience an increase in the intensity of conflict and anomia with the movement from the rural end of the continuum towards the prismatic on the scale of a rural-urban continuum. (PS)

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PRISMATIC FAMILIES AS AN IDEAL TYPE: THE CASE STUDY OF SIX RURAL NONFARM FAMILIES IN NORTH CAROLINA *

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Prismatic Family as an Ideal Type

The method of "constructive typology" which the work of Max Weber was the first to delineate and apply (Max Weber, 1949) has been richly developed and used by sociologists of the past and should not be disregarded by modern sociologists, particularly those concerned with the study of social change. Even though sociologists may disagree about the ways in which a constructed type should be derived and applied, it is clear that "The device has played an undeniable role in the growth of scientific knowledge despite the fact that it has been frequently misused, misinterpreted, or not even recognized by its users" (McKinney, 1950, pp. 235-240).

According to Carl Hempel (1952, pp. 65-86), a logical positivist, there are three main divisions of types that can be distinguished in the theories of methodology in social science: (a) classificatory types, (b) extreme types, and (c) ideal types.

In the first of these, types are constructed as classes. This approach is not accepted as typology by modern sociologists. They assert that no constructed type can be established by isolating a class; at most they call this the extracted, empirical type. The extreme types, also called the "pure" or "polar" types, Hempel designates as representing extreme places on a systematic gradation scale. The third division, "ideal" types, he sees as the result of isolating and exaggerating certain aspects of concrete empirical phenomena. Hempel separates the extreme and ideal types by including in the former those which possess specified criteria of relations to others in their appropriate gradation scales and which are used for generalization in classifying types; he leaves in the "ideal type" division those which do not possess these characteristics and functions.

As defined by Becker (1952), the "constructed" or "ideal" type is a "purposive," planned selection, abstraction, combination, and accentuation of a set of criteria that have empirical referents, and that serves as a basis for the comparison of empirical cases. The constructed type differs from ordinary concepts only in degree, not in kind. Like ordinary concepts, constructed types are made more precise through selection and limitation, plus the addition or extension of qualities which makes the construct to some extent different from the experienceable reality. Since the type more or less deviates from the reflection and correspondence of perceptual reality, exceptions to it will always be found to exist if the type has been accurately derived. The type is so devised that within its structure all the essential properties of a concrete structure (or course of action) are logically contained but not necessarily in the proportions or patterns of relationships of any empirical occurrence.

Sociologists also emphasize that the ideal type is a heuristic device, (Winch, 1947, pp. 68-75) by which the multiple and particular can be ordered according to common qualities and thereby acquires usefulness for precise statement and validation. Ideal types help us think systematically and are comprised of a structure of symbols and operating rules. If the type is well constructed, it can help understand and think about phenomena to which

it is applied; if poorly constructed it can lead to misunderstanding. Hence the degree to which our study of the families in the changing rural areas can lead to confusion or clarity may depend upon our construction of the appropriate type.

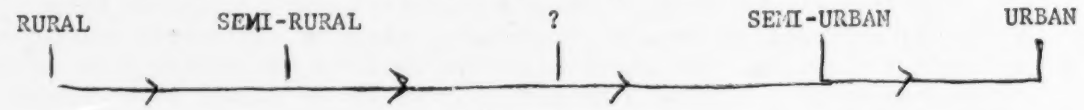
We may start with the assumption that families in the changing rural areas typically involve a combination of traditional and modern values. This assumption is well supported by the various community studies in our review of the literature. This combination of traditional and urban values and attitudes can take place along several dimensions -- for example the Springdale of Vidich and Bensman (1960) may have different dimensions of this combination as compared to Martindale and Hanson's (1969) Benson. Two families in a changing rural urban fringe area may have different combinations of traditional and modern values, attitudes, and way of life. Farming is regarded as a family tradition in a familistic rural environment (Tarver, 1952, pp. 266-271). All members of the family engage in one family occupation and social contacts are personal, primary, and intimate. Public opinion serves as a control on the behavior and spatial isolation contributes to social solidarity and dependence upon the family. Social status is largely ascribed based on traditional values rather than upon innovations (Wilkening, 1954, pp. 29-37). Dramatic changes have occurred in the sphere of social relations. The intimate, primary and personal contacts which were dominant in the rural setting have been replaced by impersonal and secondary ones. The gainful employment in diverse occupations outside the home has been taken up by the family members as contrasted with farm work in which all family members participated. The behavior of the individual is increasingly controlled by formal and impersonal social structures and no longer so much by the opinion of the small community. The religious, recreational, and educational functions formerly performed by the rural family have been taken over by other social agencies. A large rural family unit has turned into a small conjugal family unit. The traditional family function of caring for its dependent elder members is being transferred more and more to public and private agencies.

From the foregoing discussion it is clear that the traditional and modern value systems are in complete contrast and conflict with each other. There are distinct rural (traditional) values as there are distinct urban (modern) values. But what about the families in the rural-urban fringe? Are these families distinct enough in their values and attitudes so that these can form a third family type which we refer to as the "prismatic family"? Martin (1957, pp. 173-183) is of the opinion that rural and urban family types merge into a new kind of family in the metropolitan fringe. Zimmerman (1947) thinks in terms of rural and semi-rural families as contrasted with urban families. Burgess and Locke (1945) consider a third type of family as one "which seeks to combine the values of both the old rural and modern urban situations."

Whenever a structure performs a large number of functions, we may say it is functionally diffuse; when it performs specific functions, we may call it functionally specific. In view of this we can now posit two types

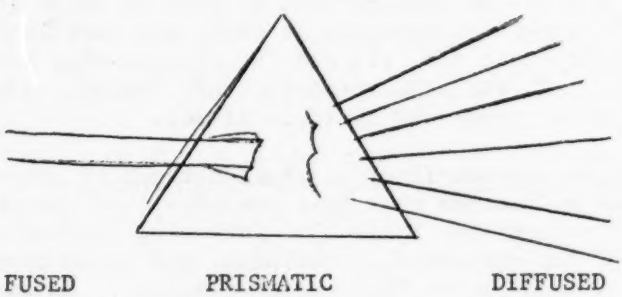
of families. In the first (rural type of family) the functions are very specific, in the second (urban family type) very diffused. We may call the first model fused and the second diffused. The terminology is taken from physics and the analysis of light. Fused light is composed of all frequencies, as in white light; whereas the diffused light isolates the component frequencies, as in a spectrum. The rural family is fused because it functions as a unit. On the contrary, the urban family is diffused because it functions in a heterogenous world which demands multiple activities from it.

The process of transformation of the fused or specific rural family to the diffused or differentiated urban family does not happen suddenly. Temporally this process varies from society to society -- it may be slow in India as compared to the United States where the pace of change is rapid. On a scale of rural-urban families Zimmerman has pointed out the existence of a semi-rural type of family. Martin (1957), Jaco and Belknap (1953), Zorbaugh (1929) and others have pointed toward the emergence of a semi-urban family. The following diagram shows this.



If we take rural, semi-rural, semi-urban, and urban as the stages of transformation of rural family into an urban family, we are left without any answer for the middle stage families (shown by question mark sign in the diagram). We contend this type is the "prismatic family."

In using the original context from which our methaphor comes, let us imagine a prism through which fused light passed to emerge diffused upon a screen, as a rainbow spectrum. Can we imagine a situation within the prism where the diffusion process starts but remains incomplete? We can refer to such a stage as "prismatic."[1] The figure below explains the process.



[1]The term "prismatic" has been taken from Riggs (1964) but our use of this term is entirely different from that of his.

The prismatic type helps us understand why types (rural and urban) devised to study both ends of a continuum are inadequate for the intermediate situation. The social sciences that study specialized structures are inadequate because, although differentiated structures arise in prismatic form, they scarcely function autonomously. One cannot, therefore comprehend any one of these structures without taking into account the related structures which continually and drastically modify its behavior.

The prismatic family type developed here is not a static entity. It constantly moves toward the urban type and adjusts and assimilates urban values gradually while leaving behind rural (traditional) values, mores, and norms. Such families are caught in a conflict situation which comes about through the opposition between rural (traditional, local) and urban (modern, nonlocal) values.

Methodology

Families may be studied not only from the point of view of their value orientations, demographic structure, place of residence, education, and social class but also in terms of the phase of the family life cycle through which they happen to be passing. While the former aspects are primarily viewed as structural, the latter viewpoint emphasizes the social interaction that takes place at the various stages of the family life.

The heads of the six families selected for the present case study were in the age group 30-39 at the time of the S-44 survey in 1961. Of these six families three are white and three are black. The structured interviewing method was used to gather comparable data on these six families in 1961 and 1966 under regional projects S-44 and S-61. These six families were interviewed in depth in 1972 in order to understand the dynamics of changes reflected in their responses to structured questions in the previous surveys and since. We chose all the families in our study from the age group of 30-39 at the time of the 1961 survey because this enabled us to study the dynamics of change in families at a somewhat similar age and stage in the life cycle.

In what follows an attempt will be made to offer interpretations to the data which have been gathered on these six families. The purpose of this interpretation is to: (1) see the changes that have taken place in these families, (2) the adjustment to these changes, (3) and the delineation of the "prismatic" types and characteristics.

In the next section first we shall attempt to present a table containing the major factors that have characterized the six families over a twelve year period (see Table 1). Following this we discuss briefly the concept of the rural-urban continuum, and based upon this concept, we delineate a typology of "prismatic" families. An attempt will also be made to identify the families which come close to the "prismatic type" and some hypotheses will be deduced using both manifest and latent types of data on these families.

Table 1. Changes in the Six Families.

Name of the Family	Anomia	Organizational Participation	Income	Informal Social Participation	Attitudes Towards Borrowing Money	Material Possession Items	Level of Living	Social Mobility	Residential Mobility	Change in Areas of Life Satisfaction	Motivations	Aspirations	Familism	Time Consciousness
The Williams Family (White)	Head High Homemaker High	No Change	Increased	No Change	Liberal	Increased	Increased	Upward	Moderate	Changed	High	High	Low	Moderate
The Ayscue Family (White)	Head High Homemaker High	No Change	Increased	No Change	Moderately Conservative	Increased	Increased	Upward	None	Slight Changes	High	High	Low	Moderate
The Roberts Family (White)	Head High Homemaker High	No Change	Increased	No Change	Liberal	Somewhat Increased	Increased	Somewhat Upward	None	None	High	High	High	Least
The Jones Family (Black)	Head High Homemaker High	No Change	Slightly Increased	No Change	Somewhat Liberal	Somewhat Increased	No Change	No Mobility	None	Changed	Low	Low	High	Least
The Connor Family (Black)	Head* Homemaker High	No Change	Decreased	**	Liberal	Decreased	Decreased	Downward Mobility	None	None	Very Low	Very Low	High	Least

Table 1 (continued)

Name of the Family	Anomia	Organizational Participation	Income	Informal Social Participation	Attitudes Towards Borrowing Money	Material Possession Items	Level of Living	Social Mobility	Residential Mobility	Change in Areas of Life Satisfaction	Motivations	Aspirations	Familism	Time Consciousness
The Thompson Family (Black)	Head High Homemaker High	No Change	No Change	No Change	Conservative	No Change	No Change	Not Mobile	None	None	Very Low	Very Low	High	Least

*The head of the family died in January, 1972.
**Due to the death and fire in the house, we did not think it proper to use questions about their interest.

Six Families

Table 1 shows some major characteristics of the six families over a twelve year period. For the want of space it is not possible to present the entire case histories of six families here and show the interaction which takes place among different variables in different life situations.

Among the six families under study, only the Williams and the Ayscues come close to the characteristics we have delineated in our typology of "prismatic" families. Both of these families live in somewhat rural isolated areas without farms. They have moderate extra-family interactions, moderate intimacy in social relationships, and experience some role ambiguity. Their personal contacts are moderate. They have moderate social visibility. They experience conflict between traditional and modern values and are somewhat predictable in their social routines. In addition, both these families are somewhat time conscious. They are quite informal in social relations and show low familism. The Roberts Family at the time of our interview stood somewhere between the semi-rural and "prismatic" stages. Our judgment about this family is that both the head and the homemaker would never enter the prismatic stage, but it is highly likely that the children of the family would directly move into the "prismatic" stage after they have left their present family.

Among the black families the Connors were moving along toward the "prismatic" stage after our interview in 1967, but with the death of the head and the unfortunate conditions brought about by a fire in the house, this family was downwardly mobile at the time of our final interview in 1972. As is the case with the Roberts, perhaps the children of this family would move into the "prismatic" stage (the girls are already married and have moved to nearby big towns). The Jones family is another case which showed some signs of upward mobility in 1972, but only the children of this family would likely enter into the "prismatic" stage. The Thompson family is a "stand still" type of family having little change during the twelve year period, except that more children were born into the family. It would probably take two generations of this family to enter into the "prismatic" stage. This family showed no signs of any mobility. It is still a basically rural black family.

Rural-Urban Continuum

In a sociological context the term rural-urban continuum has been a subject of much academic debate as is well reflected in the works of Dewey (1960), Pahl (1966), Lupri (1967), Constandse (1967), Lewis (1951), Stewart (1958), Duncan (1957), Miner (1952), Dobriner (1963), Fava (1956), Fuguitt (1962), Gans (1962a, 1962b), Lambert (1962), Stein (1960, and Mayer (1963) in addition to others. All these papers, books and monographs

IDEAL TYPES

Rural	Prismatic	Urban
1. Farm and rural areas.	1. No farm but rural areas.	1. Urban areas.
2. Relative isolation from outside world.	2. Moderate isolation.	2. No isolation.
3. Practically no mobility.	3. Moderate mobility.	3. High mobility.
4. Low extra-family interaction.	4. Moderate extra-family interaction.	4. Very high extra-family interaction.
5. High intimacy in social relationships.	5. Moderate intimacy in social relationships.	5. Low intimacy in social relationships.
6. Low role ambiguity.	6. Moderate role ambiguity.	6. High role ambiguity.
7. High personal contacts.	7. Moderate personal contacts.	7. Low personal contacts.
8. Low organizational par-participation.	8. Moderate organizational participation.	8. High organizational participation.
9. Conscious organizational participation.	9. Moderate consciousness in organizational participation.	9. Unconscious organizational participation.
10. High social visibility.	10. Moderate social visibility.	10. Low social visibility.
11. Strong familism.	11. Low familism.	11. Conjugal.
12. Strong traditional values.	12. Moderate traditional values.	12. Low traditional values.
13. High relations with nature.	13. Moderate relations with nature.	13. Low relations with nature.
14. Single set of norms and values.	14. Conflict between traditional and modern values.	14. Plural norms and values.
15. Low predictability in social routines.	15. Moderate predictability in social routines.	15. High predictability in social routines.
16. Informal social control.	16. Moderately informal social control.	16. Formal social control.
17. Informality in social relations.	17. Moderate informality in social relations.	17. Formality in social relations.
18. Least time-conscious.	18. Moderately time-conscious.	18. Highly time-conscious.

reflect that the initial source of this unsettled controversey is the classical paper by Louis Wirth (1938) entitled "Urbanism as a Way of Life." Dewey (1960, p. 60) in his paper "The Rural-Urban Continuum: Real but Relatively Unimportant," posits:

> A study of current uses of the rural-urban concepts has provided evidence which justifies discussion of what may appear at first blush to be so well understood, so apparent, and so widely agreed upon that nothing of value can possibly be added.

The rural-urban continuum has been rigorously modified recently in view of the observation that social values constitute critical independent variables in accounting for differences among rural and urban structures (Lupri, 1967). The socio-cultural components have also been taken into account recently. Likewise, the significance of the temporal or dynamic element has been stressed in the recent years.

Some of the recent studies support the fact that human communities are in the process of gradual transformation from rural to urban and that there are no discontinuities between the two types (Mayer, 1963). According to Smith (1953, p. 17):

> . . .rural and urban do not exist of themselves in a vacuum, as it were, but the principle characteristics of each may be found shading into, blending, or mixing with the essential characteristics of the other. . .

From the statement by Smith, it can be deduced that differences in economic, social and attitudinal characteristics are directly related to the different social and cultural context of the communities. Different environments tend to produce different behaviors and attitudes.

Pahl (1966) has tried to show contradiction between typology and process in relation to the continuum. According to Constandse (1966):

> The continuum . . . is neither a typology nor a process, but only a line with two ends, which can be used as a yardstick for measuring a continuity; it can be used horizontally, for a typology, and vertically for a process. If attempts to produce typologies with the help of unidimensional continuum do not succeed, this is no reason for being against typologies as such, nor is it the reason to be against a continuum as such, it is the combination of two which is wrong.

In fact, we are making a modest attempt in this direction to show the middle stage on a continuum which we have been referring to as "prismatic" type for the lack of a better term. The heuristic values of this framework from the holistic standpoint is quite important in suggesting that

there exists such a stage in the transformation process from rural to urban. Logic would suggest there is an apparent continuity in the notion of social change which is a gradual process. It is possible spatially to put a villager in a city within a few hours, but at the mental and attitudinal level it would take a couple of years or more for him to urbanize. As observations would suggest, this process never happens even spatially so suddenly, and it may entail even two generations for this movement from rural to urban areas. If the process is sudden, it may result in disastrous conflicts in the personality.

A number of propositions can be deduced based upon our observations and the typology of "prismatic" families presented previously. It is hoped that these will open avenues for further research in the exploration of the existence of such family types.

(1) The lines of tension between traditional and modern value systems are discernible in "prismatic" type of families.

(2) Anomic feelings in the "prismatic" families which are the part of the open-country side are caused by a discrepancy between the desire to participate in the possibilities of the urban-industrial world and the traditional values supplied by the rural community.

(3) The degree to which a "prismatic" family is on the rural or urban side of the scale of rural-urban continuum is a function of the amount of rural or urban values assimilated by the family.

(4) Class differences and class consciousness in the "prismatic" families are minimal but not completely absent.

(5) The intensity of conflict and anomia increases with the movement of the families from the rural end of the continuum towards the "prismatic" on the scale of rural-urban continuum.

Although our data do not completely substantiate the existence of such family types, even as a heuristic tool, the typology of "prismatic" families should encourage further research in this area. If we should have a theory of social change and transformations in social structures and social systems, then such a theory would do better in accounting for the temporal dimension of social reality as an important variable. This is an ideal, and any deviations from the ideal are, in fact, the means to attain that ideal. The present study is not any great experiment, but is certainly exhibits an example as to how one might conceptualize reality and the importance of typologies for creating conceptual clarity.

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